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ABSTRACT

Character education is a contentious and fractionated topic, yet one that has been revisited with stubborn persistence in the history of American education. To explore the complexity of the character-education debate, this theme issue presents interviews with three national figures. First, a broad perspective is provided by Theodore R. Sizer, who directs the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg National Institute for School Reform at Brown University. He believes character and intellect are inseparable, describes what good character must be, and discusses the need to restructure education in order to accommodate small communities where a dialogue among staff and students is necessary. He describes the structural constraints that impede educative efforts, such as the press force "coverage" that dominates a school day, and the lack of a sense of community among staff. In the second interview, Kevin Ryan, director of the Center for the Advancement of Character and Ethics at Boston University, seeks a return to a classical curriculum. He believes that study of the great works of literature and history can provide a "moral compass" that is lacking in today's public schools and society. In the third article, James Leming, professor of curriculum and instruction at Southern Illinois University, provides a historical overview of character-education efforts in the United States. He explains why in times of social unrest public attention turns to schooling and character development, and examines the issue of indoctrination. Finally, Florence L. Johnson, director of the National Center for Effective Schools, argues that schools, rather than focusing on character education, should establish strong nurturing support systems for all students, particularly those already at risk. (LMI)

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FOCUS IN CHANGE

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS SUMMER 1994 NO.15

CHARACTER EDUCATION

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FOCUS IN CHANGE

THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS SUMMER 1994 NO. 15

Character Education

Most people would agree that good character is something to which people should aspire, and probably would agree that schools should educate youth for character as well as intellect. However, when pressed for specifics, these same people might be less certain how to proceed—exactly what the school can do to promote good character in youth. Also, when pressed for specifics, they might question whether educative efforts to achieve good character in youth actually lie within the school's purview.

Admittedly, character education is a contentious and fractionated topic, yet one that has been revisited with stubborn persistence in the history of American education. Many advocates of specific programs for character education believe that a core set of values common to all Americans exists in our collective past, a set of values that if retrieved and inculcated in youth could bring about the result of lowered youth violence and other anti-social acts (Lockwood, 1993).†

Why is character education so controversial? It sounds simple enough: decide what values to promote and through the systematic use of a curriculum loaded with moral issues, bring these to students' attention. Why is the full story that surrounds efforts to educate for character much more complicated? To discover answers to these questions, in this issue of *Focus in Change* we take on this topic and examine it from a variety of perspectives.

First, how much and what type of evidence exists to support the claims of some character educators that character education programs will succeed in accomplishing the desired goals of reducing youth violence and other anti-social behaviors?

Next, how is good character defined —and once defined, how can it be achieved? Is it the school's responsibility to educate for good character? If so, what specific actions can the school take to encourage the development of both intellect and character? What barriers exist to such educative efforts? Are there structural aspects of the school that need to be changed before efforts to educate for character can succeed?

Finally, what is the history of the character education movement in the United States—and how might that inform the present debate? Current renewed attention to character education echoes public interest and money expended in the 1920s, when similar —but much milder—cries of dismay about youthful behavior were heard. Are there lessons educators can learn from this previous movement?

We sought answers to these and other questions from three national figures. First, a broad perspective is provided by Theodore R. Sizer, who directs the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg National Institute for School Reform at Brown University. Sizer, former Dean of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, believes character and intellect are inseparable. In his comments, he illustrates what good character must be, and the need to structure schools differently to accommodate small communities where a relentless dialogue among staff and between staff and students is not only welcomed, but necessary.

Sizer provides a realistic and pragmatic view of the structural constraints that impede educative efforts in many schools, and argues that the individual teacher cannot succeed in an environment where the press for 'coverage' dominates the school day and where a sense of community is not present among staff.

Next we hear the views of Kevin Ryan, who directs the Center for the Advancement of Character and Ethics at Boston University. Ryan seeks a return to a classical curriculum, to 'great' works of literature and history, believing that within them moral lessons and answers for youth can be found—what he terms 'a moral compass.'

Ryan believes that today's public schools possess a sterile curriculum void of moral lessons—and that schools must act to fill a profound moral vacuum that permeates American society.

Third, we learn about the history of character education efforts in the United States from James Leming, professor of curriculum and instruction at Southern Illinois University and a widely recognized scholar on moral and values-related issues. Is the current character education movement dramatically different from that of the 1920s? What legacy is left us by that earlier effort?

More largely, Leming sketches the tenor of the times that encourages renewed interest in character education, explaining why in times of social unrest public attention turns to schooling and, in turn, to character development. He examines the issue of indoctrination, explaining when it is justified and cautioning of its dangers.

We conclude with the perspective of Florence L. Johnson, NCES Director.

†*Lockwood, A. L. (1993, November). A letter to character educators.* Educational Leadership, *51*(3), *72-75.*

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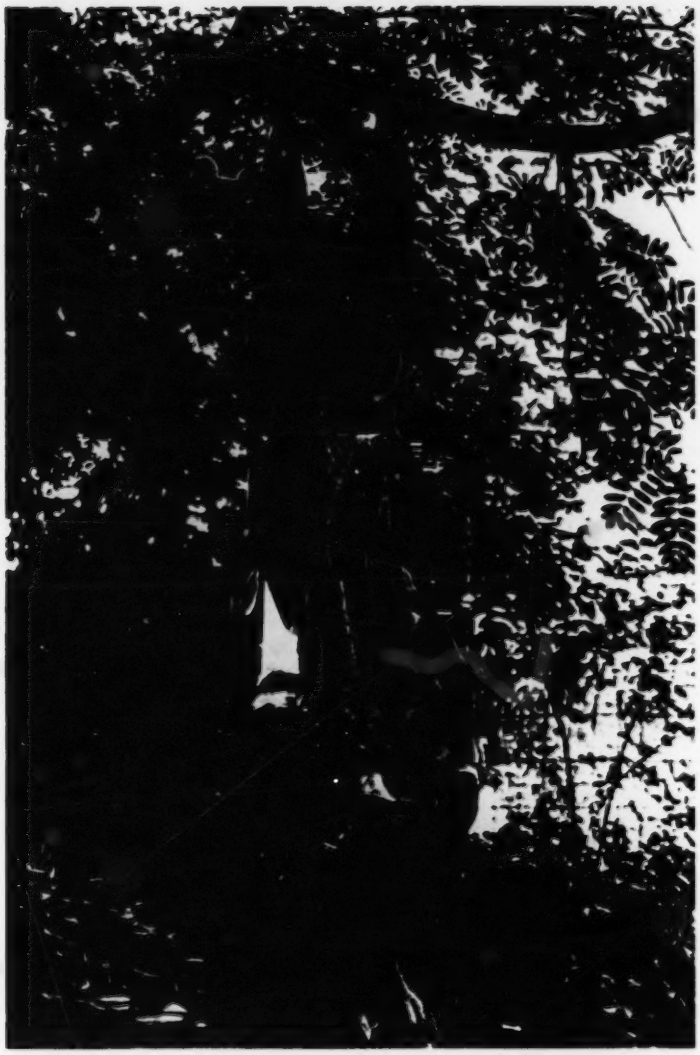

"It isn't sentimental to say that good schools are like good families."

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Educating For Character

ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

HOW should schools educate for character? Given the current structure of most public schools, how can educators cope with increasing demands upon their time and energies? Does educating for character demand a restructuring of schools as they currently exist? Is it the school's responsibility to take on the task of turning out good citizens, people of good character? What does good character mean?

We posed these and other questions to a long-time authority on school reform, Theodore R. Sizer, who is a professor of education and chairman of the Coalition of Essential Schools at Brown University. Throughout his distinguished career, Sizer has been at the forefront of issues confronting educators interested in and directly working on school reform. In 1994 Sizer became director of the Annenberg National Institute for School Reform.

Well-known for his books, Sizer is the author of Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School *(1984) and* Horace's School: Redesigning the American High School *(1992). In his work with the Coalition and the Annenberg National Institute for School Reform, he is directly engaged in furthering school restructuring efforts nationwide.*

Good character, Ted Sizer says, is like pornography: difficult to define but easy to recognize. Following up on his statement, he enlarges: "You come into a crunch in a school, and there are some kids you trust, and some you don't. You know there are some kids who will always tell you the truth and will do it in a discreet way. There are kids who can be counted on to be thoughtful and understand the implications of things before they act. We say those are kids of good character."

Painting a picture of good character, Sizer sketches a scene from the 1970s when he was a high school principal. "We were visited by a delegation from the People's Republic of China," he says, "grey old men who were the equivalent of state commissioners of education. In our school we had a significant number of Asian Americans, Chinese Americans, and also a high number of kids from Taiwan, Vietnam, and Singapore. Many were from families which had fled the People's Republic of China."

Obviously, the impending visit was a source of controversy, even potential action on the part of these students. As Sizer explains, the students caucused and decided not to protest the visit. "They concluded that these visiting Communist representatives were first and foremost Chinese and only secondly Communists. Furthermore, they were guests in our school and should be treated therefore with respect. Not only did these students welcome the non-English-speaking visitors, but they decided among themselves, among the Cantonese-speakers and the Mandarin-speakers, who would be the guides. They dressed up so I barely recognized them and were wonderful ambassadors for these visitors."

To Sizer, this example is particularly telling of good character. "It is a trivial example of an untrivial characteristic," he says. "The young people figured out how those traveling Chinese Communists must feel; they thought about the implications of a potential boycott of the visitors, and they made a principled decision. I consider that an example of good character. Basically, their own views were put second, and the welfare of the visitors was put first."

In another incident, Sizer remembers a dramatic occasion in an inner-city Coalition school, where the student population was largely comprised of low-income minority youth.

"On the day after the Los Angeles riots, a school choir from rural Michigan visited that school, all blond, blue-eyed white kids. The question became: Should the faculty cancel the school assembly where these visitors would sing? The faculty decided not to.

"One of the seniors, a male African American, came down to the podium and in a brief speech first expressed fury about what happened in Los Angeles and then expressed the statement that these people behind him—these terrified white kids—were guests and that the anger should not be directed at them. He wanted them to feel welcome."

The school environment in which this incident occurred comprises what Sizer calls a principled school. "That kid showed enormous courage," he says, "and in my experience that behavior is an example of high character. Certainly it demonstrates empathy and seeing something in its fullness, but those qualities have been stressed in this deliberately small school, where the adults are very self-conscious about how they relate to each other, knowing as they do that the kids watch them. In a huge high school, that would not have worked."

He adds: "That school has 450 students, and a very simple curriculum. They take math/science for two and a half hours and then the humanities for two and a half hours, team-taught. Every kid is part of an advisory that includes about 15 youngsters and an adult. They stay in that advisory during their high school years. It is a deliberately personalized, very simple school where the faculty work visibly as teams and in tandem. There is endless talk about developing good habits."

Good habits are not incidental to the development of good character, and in Sizer's view, the school does have a role—and a responsibility—to

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be actively involved in the education of character, which he sees as embedded in intellect—a far from incidental symbiosis.

Although 'character' has been the source of much rhetoric, what precisely does it mean? Is there a succinct definition that educators can use to guide their efforts? In his reply, Sizer refers to the work of Lawrence Kohlberg. "Good character has at its heart the intellect. It has to do with getting into the habit of thinking about the consequences of things and making some judgment about the importance of the consequences against some principle.

"For Kohlberg, it was justice. That is not the only principle, but ultimately good schools are about helping kids get into good habits. Certainly one of the habits is being empathetic, being almost instinctively able to and disposed to consider the consequences of things before making a decision or taking an action. The youngster who thinks before she acts is more principled than another, and a more principled youngster could be called a person of good character."

Is the character education movement effective in achieving its desired goals of improved student behavior? Sizer maintains that instead of producing the desired outcomes, the movement has been stymied by its own rhetoric. "We have all sorts of goals and standards for schools, and they talk about good character, but nobody asks to define it. Even if defined, nobody asks: 'What are the implications for practice?'

"It's all talk," he says dismissively, "but it is like so many things in schools. We want a rigorous academic education, but we interrupt classes with the public address system. Kids pick this up and realize the class can't be very important if it's interrupted with an announcement about the cheerleaders. So the gap between talk and action is very, very wide, particularly in this area."

Why so much rhetoric and such little action? "It's the structure of schools," Sizer responds, "and the fact that many people really don't care. They don't care collectively. In all the hullabaloo in the last ten years over goals and standards there hasn't been anything significant about the implications of producing a civic-minded, decent population."

Instead, standardized tests and manipulation of college admissions dominate the landscape in many schools, he says. "What counts in schools are test scores, and they have nothing to do with the quality of the individual who displays those scores. Therefore there are no incentives for taking seriously how to create adult communities which are worthy places for kids to be educated."

Although many advocates of character education espouse lists of values to be taught—and their lists vary widely—Sizer dismisses their differences. "They are only lists," he says. "There is a short list in any moderately good school—much less very good schools: There will be no violence, not only physical violence, but psychological violence. There will be truthfulness. There will be no cheating. This is a list upon which most Americans from Ralph Nader to Phyllis Schlafly could agree, but even these characteristics are ignored beyond the rhetoric."

The chasm between rhetoric and action is a very large issue—within which the quest for character can be found. This education for character, like all educative efforts, begins with the collective of the school, not the individual teachers. "Unless the school is itself a federation of small communities, it is very hard to do anything," he says matter-of-factly. "A community which is basically thoughtless and which treats most youngsters by category, such as slotting them into the tenth grade and the honors track, essentially depersonalizes them.

"If schools depersonalize kids," he continues, "it is impossible to teach well anything about thoughtfulness. A teacher who faces 150 kids a day in waves from period to period is simply a finger in the dike. There is little he or she can do alone."

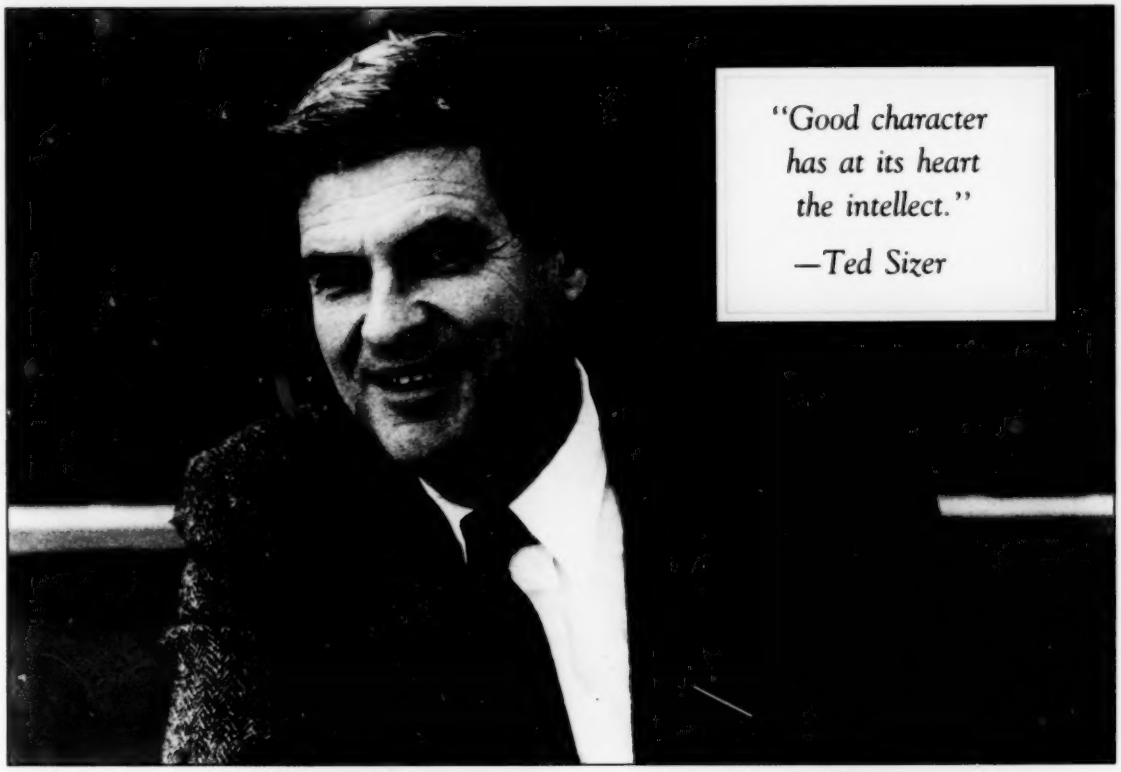
Instead, there must be care and attention on the part of the staff to their own behavior, thoughts, and actions before expectations for youth can begin to be fulfilled. Sizer points out hypocrisy present in many schools. "If we're against violence, what about the violence to be found in sports such as ice hockey? If we're against violence, we should be against violence, period. Not only that, but schools help kids to pad their applications to college by telling them they need more extracurriculars, like Stamp Club and chorus.

"That is dishonesty," he stresses. "Most schools conspire with kids to lie to colleges. Kids are smart. They pick that up and understand that is what one does. We do it on our taxes, and we lie to people on things of great importance like admission to college."

Constant debate and dialogue among students—but most importantly, among staff—are not only recommended, but necessary to promote good character, Sizer maintains. "Character really means the habits that arise from thoughtful behavior. If kids are always expected not only to struggle over important questions, but also get into the habit of figuring out good questions that they should ask on their own, those habits are more likely to stick than others.

"If school is nothing more than the transmission of other people's answers to other people's questions and depersonalized tests, all that does is reinforce bad habits and we end up with things like the cheating scandal at the Naval Academy."

Doesn't this scenario of a personalized school environment where great attention is placed on living out good character presuppose certain dispositions on the part of teachers? "Absolutely," Sizer replies. "It is the



collectivity of the school that counts, not teachers one by one. It is not just how I in my classroom behave, it is how I as an adult relate to all the other adults in the school, from the janitor to the principal."

As just one aspect of school structure that inhibits the development of good character in students, he refers to the traditional system of teacher appointments as a major impediment to developing good character in students. "We have a medieval system," he observes. "Teachers are licensed on the basis of something they studied at some university; they are treated on the basis of that license, not as a human being. Many cities will move teachers across schools on the basis of their licenses and seniority. This has nothing to do with the nature of the adult community of schools, the nature of which is the most powerful single influence on the development of decent kids."

But what about schools with a poor climate, bickering among staff, no sense of community, and little feeling of teamwork or collectivity? What can turn that negative situation into a climate conductive to the development of good character?

In such situations, Sizer believes the adults must come to grips with their own dysfunctionality—a provocative statement. "That requires time," he says, "and time is money. It means taking the whole faculty for a week to a conference center to work with them. Another alternative is that the school boards simply shut the school, disperse everybody, and reopen it with the building serving as a holding tank for three or four smaller schools. They are independent in that they are not a house system where the principals and assistant principals still control them. In a couple of cases in California, that was ultimately the only way to deal with the large dysfunctional community that had emerged over the years within the adults."

Are dysfunctional schools similar to dysfunctional families? "Exactly," Sizer agrees. "It isn't sentimental to say that good schools are like good families. The analogy really works, particularly when we talk about things like character and decency."

But what happens once the school staff is removed to a conference center for a week? What must occur before they can confront—and deal with—their own dysfunctionality?

"After attending their various meetings—and listening—you get them all together if you have the ability to do so, and read quotes to them. You say: 'This is what I heard. I am

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not attaching names to these. Let me read to you thirty statements that I have heard in the last twenty-four hours,' and you read them."

The result, Sizer says, can provoke considerable anger. He illustrates by describing Patricia Wasley's studies of schools going through change. "Three years ago, she and a team started a series of systematic visits to six high schools in New Mexico, Kentucky, New York, and Pennsylvania—all comprehensive high schools. She and her team spent a week or two twice a year at each school, listening and recording. They would take down quotes, and then they wrote portraits, which were sent to the full faculty each time.

"Predictably, the first portraits caused an explosion, even though the portraits essentially were language that was direct quotes. In the next stage, Wasley included some outsiders who would go to the school to listen to the fury of the community, kids, parents, and teachers. Their purpose was to ascertain whether in fact the anger was because the research team didn't get it right or whether the anger was because this research team identified a massive problem that no one wanted to address.

"The team has now gone through this six times in these schools, and in many ways that process is necessary to really get underneath a school. The very process of making available to a faculty its own voices is a form of reform. As a research project, it doesn't have objectivity in the traditional sense, but it goes a lot deeper than most research, because it gets into the marrow of the collective bones."

What Sizer calls "mirror-holding" in a school is a starting place. "Of course folks don't want to do that," he shrugs. "Folks want to have courses on character development, which is mindless."

One topic on which Sizer has written is the link or distance between the public schools and religion. Are there factions in the current character education movement who are trying to get religious instruction into the public schools via character education programs?

"The pressure on schools in our project from religious groups," Sizer notes, "focuses more on matters of general conduct and personal privacy than strictly sectarian or theological ideas. Some of our schools have been attacked for asking kids to keep journals on the argument that it's an invasion of a kid's privacy."

He sees this as an interesting argument. "The prayer issue is a stalking horse," he says. "Kids pray at school all the time before their exams. Prayer in the school seems relatively trivial to me in the sense that it doesn't affect the functioning of a school profoundly. What affects the functioning of a school profoundly is when a kid dies and the line between the religious world and the secular world absolutely disappears."

He adds: "I don't know how you can keep religion out of serious history or literature courses. How do you explain the Renaissance without explaining religion? There are all kinds of religions, from soldiers in a war doing what seem to be utterly irrational things like charging into a hail of gunfire at Gallipoli. That shows a kind of irrational commitment. Is irrational commitment related to any kind of commitment to something which you cannot prove scientifically?"

Thoughtfully, he says: "Maybe it is. Isn't that religion? I don't know how you teach these courses without dealing with religion, and I don't know how you deal with a community—particularly in a time of real grief—without dealing with religion. That doesn't mean proselytizing, but to pretend religion isn't part of the human condition is to fly in the face of reality."

Still, the line between secular and sectarian is a fine one, and he admits it is difficult. "It's a very tough call, and as a high school principal I caught it coming and going."

The difficulty of establishing the type of school community necessary to fully educate for character as well as for intellect is enormous, Sizer reflects. "It is very difficult to get the subject into the real discourse of the school community; difficult to consider what might have to change in order to accommodate certain conclusions about what it would take to have a school which is more—rather than less—likely to get kids into the habit of being thoughtful and therefore exhibiting good character."

He notes wryly: "At the same time, the topic is one about which it is very easy to be self-righteous, with the shaking voice, the quivering lower lip, the question: 'How can students do these dreadful things?'. You get the worst of both worlds. You get a lot of highly emotional talk which goes nowhere, and then when you really get a community to look at itself, it's very difficult to get very far with it."

Again Sizer looks back to his years as a high school principal to provide yet another example. "On a summer curriculum committee, someone wanted to see whether the committee members could agree on ten of the 420 graduates in whom we took special pride. The list was quite easy to put together.

"Then the committee asked what it was about each youngster that caused us to take such pride in him or in her, and what of that substance we could properly assign as a school effect, how much of it were certain habits the kid arrived with, and how much were evolved in the school."

He says with finality: "That discussion took us away from SAT scores and into this very murky area of the quality of the kid. By the end of the summer the committee was absolutely stymied. The discussion didn't go anywhere, but it was an example for me: Probably the most important thing you do in a school is the one which seems to defy collective action."

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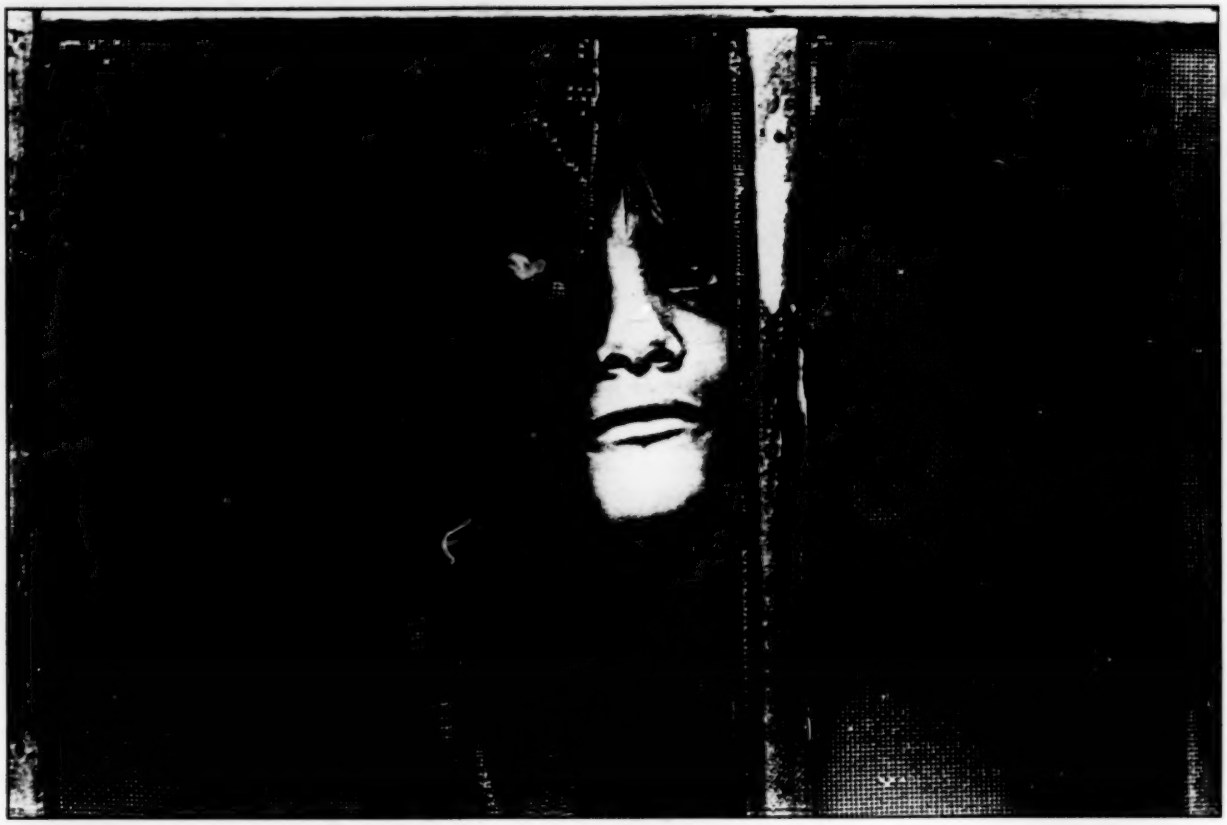

TURNING AND TURNING IN THE WIDENING GYRE
THE FALCON CANNOT HEAR THE FALCONER;
THINGS FALL APART; THE CENTRE CANNOT HOLD;
MERE ANARCHY IS LOOSED UPON THE WORLD,
THE BLOOD-DIMMED TIDE IS LOOSED, AND EVERYWHERE
THE CEREMONY OF INNOCENCE IS DROWNED;
THE BEST LACK ALL CONVICTION, WHILE THE WORST
ARE FULL OF PASSIONATE INTENSITY.

W.B. YEATS

THE MORAL COMPASS

ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

TO gain the perspective of an long-time advocate for schoolwide character education programs, we consulted with Kevin Ryan, Director of the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character at Boston University, where he is also professor of education. We asked: What is character education? How does a school or district reach consensus on whose values to teach? What evidence, if any, exists that such programs are effective in achieving their stated goals of improving behavior?

Ryan is the co-author (with Edward Wynne) of Reclaiming Our Schools: A Handbook on Teaching Character, Academics, and Discipline *(Macmillan, 1993). A former high school English teacher, he has written or edited 15 books, including* Those Who Can, Teach *and* The Roller Coaster Year: Stories by and for First Year Teachers, *as well as over 80 articles. His primary academic foci are moral education and teacher education. Ryan has received awards from the University of Helsinki, the Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, and the Association of Teacher Educators. In 1990 he was the recipient of Boston University's Scholar Teacher Award.*

Ryan explains that the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character addresses the needs of schools and teacher education institutions, working to renew interest in character education.

To Kevin Ryan, it is clear why disaffection with public schools is on the increase: public educators, he says, have folded their tents and abandoned the moral arena, leaving parents hungry for moral answers for their children. "We have stopped asking the moral question: What's the right thing to do?" Ryan says emphatically. "We no longer ask: Did we do the right thing? What ought we have done? What's the correct human response in this situation?"

Yet Ryan finds hope in renewed public interest in issues of character, which he swiftly defines. " 'Character' comes from a Greek word, 'to engrave,' and it acknowledges the fact that people come into life and consciousness in a very plastic way in many dimensions. Although 'character' is an old word, it is experiencing a renaissance, mainly because it speaks to a more dynamic approach to trying to help a child develop a moral compass, develop himself or herself as a moral individual."

> *"We need to make sure that people are, at a minimum, good people."*

Ryan believes that youth are especially plastic around issues of right and wrong—and that places a moral imperative on schools to shape values and beliefs. "Forming a character means forming both a moral sensibility and also the enduring habits by which one lives one's life, such as a sense of responsibility and diligence about doing assigned tasks. Character education tries to get both the student and the institution to be attentive to the fact that youth is a period of time when people are in this wax-like state and need to attend to the issue of developing good character."

The malleability of youth places a heavy responsibility—whether it is de facto or deliberate—on schools to mold character, he believes. "It is impossible to have a child for 180 days a year in a social environment where there are rewards and punishments, where issues of values are continually part of their lives—and while they are in this plastic state—and not address the ethical, moral, and character domain."

He adds: "It's inevitable that a school has some sort of a moral impact, but we see plenty of examples of schools in wealthy and not-so-wealthy communities where there is no serious attention to issues of character. The results are quite troubling. If schools do not address moral issues, parents are very much within their rights to be enormously angry."

Enlarging upon his theme, Ryan notes: "In a way, the state puts a gun to the heads of parents and takes the child. For many people, there is no choice about which school their children will attend. Therefore, it is very troubling to have the child in a school that does not address the moral concerns of parents in a satisfactory way."

But who determines what comprises a satisfactory treatment of parents' moral concerns in our pluralistic society? Ryan acknowledges that constraints on some public schools might push—from necessity—the emphasis away from moral issues, but he believes it is possible to achieve a different scenario in which an emphasis on character is paramount.

"There may be no solution within the current structure of public schools," he says. "It may be that the state compulsion that lies behind public education runs against the issue

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of parents having a right to a moral environment for their children, having a set of moral ideas and character qualities addressed. These things may be in unresolvable opposition, but that is the extreme situation."

Instead, Ryan maintains that if local communities can find common moral ground—which he sees as an educational imperative—character education efforts will succeed. "These efforts should be local, because the most effective character education environments are ones where the values, virtues, and efforts are a product of the families, of the community leaders, and of the teachers in that particular situation."

Ryan is especially emphatic about local control, saying: "The death of this whole effort occurs when it comes from Clinton's office or the governor's office. It must be community-based."

Common Moral Ground

Given the factionated and often contentious nature of determining whose values should be taught, what process does Ryan recommend for communities to reach consensus? "The leadership of the school," he replies carefully, "needs to have an open forum, in which they say that an important part of children's education is the acquisition of certain human qualities. They should point out that there are certain moral ideas that are the bedrock requirement of a democracy, and they should say that they want the community's input about what should be taught and how it should be taught.

"If there is great support, the school committee can go ahead and direct the teachers along a particular line. If there is dissension, a system-wide committe can try to define common ground for the schools in the district."

As an example, Ryan describes the process taken by the Baltimore County (MD) schools. "It is a very diverse community, and purposely they had a very diverse committee: the radical right religious minister, the ACLU lawyer, various groups, and management. All the people who were concerned about this issue were represented on the committee. While they had some initial difficulty, it was very brief. They identified a very strong mission for the schools and specific values."

Although the committee coalesced around its mission and values, it also agreed that each school should have its own committee which would identity that school's approach to character education, giving plenty of autonomy to individual schools to evolve their own programs of character education.

A Program of Character Education

What would a carefully conceived, community-based program of character education look like? In his answer, Ryan points to the need to change the curriculum first. "In the last thirty years, we have withdrawn from teaching the history, the stories, and the literature that are the great moral culture carriers. We have taken a very indirect approach to character education through developmental psychology, through values clarification, through the critical thinking approach. In all of this, we stopped asking about the right thing to do.

"We stopped exploring literature and history, which represents the seeds of our oral wisdom. We stopped asking: What does it say to us now? What does it say about how we should live our lives together?"

But a classical emphasis on literature and history as cornerstones of an education for character is not enough, Ryan insists. "Apart from literature and history, certainly science has a moral necessity to report data honestly, to do an experiment cleanly and well. Without honesty, science totally collapses."

He sees character education extending into athletic activities, pointing out numerous opportunities for faculty to find moral lessons for youth through sports.

"The whole reason for sport is to help children to learn how to live, to work together and compete within a particular set of rules, rules that are man-made," he explains. "The justification for sport is teaching kids how to live within rules, how to win and lose gracefully. This whole concept of sportsmanship has a tremendous amount of moral content."

Besides concentrating on a more classical curriculum, Ryan emphasizes that youth learn by example. "The school, again de facto, presents the young with examples, examples in the curriculum. Many figures—whether they are Eleanor Roosevelt or Hitler—are there with the underlying purpose of presenting the young with the people who have made a contribution to our situation, or who have betrayed us."

These examples, coupled with modeling provided by school staff, illustrate success to children, Ryan maintains. "The young have one overwhelming project in life: to become a successful adult. They know that in their unformed way, and they spend much of their time looking at adults and others in their lives, saying: 'I want to be like that,' or 'I don't want to be like that.' " Therefore, the quality of the people that we present to the young as examples is very important."

He points to the requirement in most schools of education that the dean asserts that the graduates are people of good character. "This acknowledges the fact that teachers are role models or even exemplars. We need to make sure that people are, at a minimum, good people. We hope they're excellent people."

Barriers to Character Education in Today's Schools

Clearly, Ryan is philosophically and practically at odds with the present

structure of schooling, which he describes as an "odd situation."

"We compel children to go to school; at the same time we have a strong sense of religious freedom and religious liberty. A school, de facto, promotes a particular worldview. The school that tries desperately not to mention anything of a transcendent theological nature—and succeeds—is presenting a worldview to the young, a worldview without a God."

This tension, Ryan maintains, accounts for the positions of the left and right on character education in public schools. "A lot of the concern about the topic comes from the left and the right: the left sees character education as a cloak for religious ideas, an imposition on the individuality of students, a socialization by someone of certain ways of behaving that someone has decided are important.

"The right, on the other hand, is very suspicious of this, because they see it as secular humanists trying to impose a set of values that will give kids a moral compass that does not acknowledge the primacy of the Godhead."

Where does Ryan fit on this continuum? Pausing, he replies: "In the middle, perhaps a little to the right of center. I place myself there because I *do* think the public schools have gone through a period of sanitizing the curriculum so that it is free of any strong moral or religious messages. Through teacher training, teachers have become much more technicians rather than people who carry society's enduring moral ideas, good and bad."

Enlarging upon this, he adds: "A lot of the reaction to public education is a growing anger, because people feel that the schools have gotten very far away from being the support to community and family that they once were."

Ryan believes a huge moral void has left the American public hungry for moral content and fiber, moral content that could—and should—be found in schools. "While we all argue about various approaches to character education, kids are looking for answers. More and more people are looking at the products of our schools and realizing there is a grave problem.

"In earlier periods, although schools were imperfect and mistakes abounded, they were a moral presence in the life of a child; they provided answers. Now, increasingly the teacher says: 'That's not my job.' According to a survey I read in The Wall Street Journal two years ago, 32% of teachers said teaching standards of right and wrong was not one of their jobs."

He insists that schools that are effective make character education a priority, whether it be at the elementary or secondary level. "There is a moral conversation among the staff, and among the staff and students. There is a mission statement that has real teeth and meaning. Teachers point to the moral and ethical issues all the time."

The Ambivalence of Teachers

What about teachers' reluctance to engage in discussions of moral issues? Ryan responds: "Many teachers are very enthusiastic because this is what drew them to education. They came to teach because they are interested in young people, because they want to be a positive moral and intellectual force in the lives of the young. They see issues of character as integral to their job description.

"On the other hand, again because of the experiences many young people have in their own elementary and secondary education, and also because teacher education programs tend to be silent about it, they're quite puzzled. They feel that they are doing a difficult job, they are underpaid, and every time there is a social problem, the schools are asked to fix it. They have real concerns about not feeling a very strong mandate from their community or administrators to concentrate on character issues, they have no understanding of what the issues are, and they are genuinely bothered and upset by it."

He notes: "I'm very sympathetic to them."

What barriers exist to the implementation of the type of character education program he advocates—one in which a moral dialogue exists between staff and students? In his reply, Ryan first indicts universities.

"Few of the young who come to be educated encounter what I would call the moral wisdom of the species. Very few students take philosophy. Very few take theology or ethics. Very few take even the kind of great literature of Eastern and Western thought typically identified as 'great,' because it has something crucial to say about the human condition.

"In an earlier period, we engaged the college in the moral conversation that was the essence of education at that time. Now, education is much more vocational and technical, and it is presented in a utilitarian mode. In other words, if you take these courses, we will give you a degree."

Part of the reason for the shift, Ryan believes, is entangled in the rewards afforded faculty throughout the university. "We tend to be rewarded for our own specialties. The more students we can interest in our specialties, the better we are doing. The modern university does a much better job of expending knowledge than transmitting essential human knowledge. As a result, a lot of people come out of college as moral and ethical illiterates."

Universities aside, he also believes the public schools have faltered. "We have lost the mission of character formation and moral education within the public school system. Before it comes back, there is going to be a period of struggle before people realize it is not a substitute for some sort of religious-based instruction. It will take time for people to calm down about it. It will also take time for people to get a clear idea of what is involved in it."

Part of the problem underpinning schools' reluctance to engage in moral issues, he says, is that much of the tradition in moral education has come out of either values clarification or the moral reasoning approach of Kohlberg, neither of which Ryan endorses. "Their way to improve people was to give them these very difficult problems about fifteen people on a boat that holds only eight. Who do you throw over first? Who is next to go? That kind of moral hard-case exploration has gotten the most attention.

"On the other hand, the classical type of character education has tried to engage the young in their own human perfection, in their own making of themselves, in the sense that they are both the sculptor and the stone on which they are working. As a teacher, you try to give them a sense of what human excellence is and help them to make themselves into this kind of a person, a person who has these strong enduring habits, who has a sense of clarity about the right thing to do."

What evidence exists to support the notion that character education programs do succeed in their efforts to change behavior in a positive direction? Ryan answers candidly: "I don't know of any persusive evidence. The issues are complicated and ephemeral and the research tools unavailable at this point."

But a lack of evidence does not persuade him that character education efforts should be abandoned. "We are trapped in our empiricism," he says with conviction. "Empiricism doesn't answer many really important questions. If we decide that we will only implement character education if there is strong empirical evidence that it works, we are doomed for failure. On the other hand, if we draw upon the wisdom of the ages and our own common sense, character education will again have a central place in our schools."

Whose Values Should We Teach?

American Institute For Character Education
Courage, conviction, generosity, kindness, helpfulness, honesty, honor, justice, tolerance, the sound use of time and talent, freedom of choice, freedom of speech, good citizenship, the right to be an individual, and the right of equal opportunity.

William Bennett
Strength of mind, individuality, independence, moral quality,. . . thoughtfulness, fidelity, kindness, diligence, honesty, fairness, self-discipline, respect for law, and taking one's guidance by accepted and tested standards of right and wrong rather than by, for example, one's personal preference.

State Of Maryland's Values Education Commission's "Character Objectives"
1. Personal integrity and honesty rooted in respect for the truth, intellectual curiosity, and love of learning. *2.* A sense of duty to self, family, school, and community. *3.* Self-esteem rooted in the recognition of one's potential. *4.* Respect for the rights of all persons regardless of their race, religion, sex, age, physical condition, or mental state. *5.* A recognition of the right of others to hold and express differing views, combined with the capacity to make discriminating judgments among competing opinions. *6.* A sense of justice, rectitude, fair play and a commitment to them. *7.* A disposition of understanding, sympathy, concern, and compassion for others. *8.* A sense of discipline and pride in one's work; respect for the achievements of others. *9.* Respect for one's property and the property of others, including public property. *10.* Courage to express one's convictions.

Edward Wynne
Tact, honesty, obedience to legitimate authority, perseverence, good humor, loyalty.

As quoted in Character Education: Research Prospects and Problems, *by Ivor Pritchard (1988, April), p.3. Working Paper No. 1. Washington, DC: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.*

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ANNE TURNBAUGH LOCKWOOD

WHAT explains the renewed public premium currently placed on issues related to character? Can educators learn from character education programs of the past? What do the current proponents of character education hope to achieve? What barriers exist to their goals? Is sufficient evidence present to support the contention that character education programs succeed?

For a scholarly viewpoint on these and other questions, we turned to James S. Leming, Professor of Curriculum & Instruction at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. Leming, a well-known scholar on issues related to character education and social studies, is the author of numerous articles, book chapters, and scholarly papers. A former high school social studies and math teacher, Leming has been a member of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's National Panel to Develop A Policy Statement on Moral Education, and also has served as an expert witness and consultant on many value-related issues, including curricula for sex education.

Renewed interest in issues pertaining to character development and appropriate values for youth stems from a deep public concern that society is drifting in a negative direction; that the American people need—indeed, crave—a return to a seemingly more secure time. As James Leming explains, such a resurgence of interest in character education is not new on the American horizon—and, in fact, has a cyclic persistance.

"In this century," he begins, "there have been periods when the general population developed a concern about society's cohesiveness, its values, and what it stands for. Those times have occurred when traditional values appeared to be threatened and challenged."

Pointing to the Roaring Twenties, Leming lists then-current concerns: "Women's suffrage, urbanization of society, increasing patterns of immigration, progressivism, the Bolshevik Revolution, and World War I all indicated that the center did not seem to hold, things were falling apart. People became very concerned about who we were as a people, what values we held in common, what traditions we shared among ourselves."

More currently, the late 1960s and early 1970s led to a scrutiny of value-related questions. "Again, there was a crisis of confidence about who we are as a society and what values we stand for," Leming comments, again listing examples. "There was Woodstock, self-expressiveness, women's liberation, Black power, the war in Viet Nam, and Watergate."

Such historical periods explain, he says, why the public turns to youth and the schools for value-related solutions to society's woes. "The public naturally turns to young people and thinks there is something wrong with their education, that there is a need to return to our traditional values."

Politically, Leming points to the election of Ronald Reagan as a benchmark for renewed fervor directed toward character education efforts. "The reassertion of the conservative political and social agenda in this country was symbolic of the general concern that the American people had: things were falling apart in our society, it was no longer the Eisenhower era." He adds sardonically, "Ward and June Cleaver were not living next door to Ozzie and Harriet."

Instead, Leming adds, the makeup of families had changed dramatically, male/female relations had shifted, drug use had escalated, and social mores had relaxed to the point to engender public alarm. "There was a real sense of social and moral malaise in the 1980s just as in the 1920s," he notes. "This provided the fuel for these movements."

Is public interest in character education a misplaced nostalgia, a yearning for a time that never existed, or is it future-driven? In his reply, Leming gives credence to both possibilities. "There is a type of nostalgia about character education, since character educators have the idea that somewhere in our history we were able to identify values that we, the American people, have stood for and should stand for again. It is a conservative movement, in that it wants to preserve. It is not libertarian; it is not progressive. It doesn't want to move toward a utopian or new or different or better future. Basically, it wants to return to a traditional society built upon traditional values."

On the other hand, he asserts that character educators would claim they look to the future, but their vision of it is tightly and carefully drawn around particular values. "These educators would maintain we need certain sets of values to deal constructively with the future, and we have lost those values.

"They would use this metaphor: We have taken our oars and our rudder out of the water; how can we face the future with nothing to guide us in our future lives? We need to have a rudder, a sense of course for the future."

The goals of character education circle around eliminating those aspects of youthful behavior that are negative—again, a goal not new to American schooling. "Almost all the work on character education discusses the declining well-being of youth," Leming points out, "in which the authors cite violence, cheating in schools, disrespect for authority, sexual promiscuity, drug use, and self-destructive behavior. They think there

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is a real crisis in youth character, so they want the schools to take the responsibility to instill proper values in youth, a task that families and communities may no longer be performing.

"The character education movement is characterized by a very positive and altruistic motive—a real concern for youth. Of equal importance, however, is the idea that there is a crisis in society and that they want to return society to its traditional values. Many of the works in character education have elaborate charts that track youth character over time, showing declines in SAT scores, increases in teen suicide, children born out of wedlock, and other indices of youth character. Clearly, character educators want to reverse these."

When do the efforts of character educators become indoctrination? Is indoctrination or inculcation into a set of values positive or negative? Leming replies thoughtfully: "Indoctrination has many different meanings to different people. The central problem with indoctrination is whether or not it has an adverse effect on the development of autonomy, the individual's ability to choose who he wants to be and by what values he wishes to live."

"Every parent indoctrinates, and every elementary school teacher indoctrinates. We tell kids to get back in their seats and to raise their hands before they speak. We say: 'This is how it is, and this is the way you should believe.' We use all of the authority we have as parents or teachers to inculcate or indoctrinate these patterns of behavior in kids. Actually, indoctrination is inevitable if you are a parent or a teacher in elementary schools. It is an effective way to get children to internalize desirable habits and behavior."

Yet he sounds a cautionary note. "Indoctrination is harmful if it creates an expectation in the child that values or actions should not have reasons supporting them. One needs to be careful in the exercise of authoritative or indoctrinative approaches with children so that their potential for future autonomous development is not closed off, and so that they do not develop an aversion to rationality."

As an aside, he adds: "A tough question for teachers is what level of autonomy they should expect from students in high school, what level of authority they should maintain, and what is the balance between the teacher's responsibility to communicate traditional and democratic values to kids in an authoritative way, and also to respect the students' right to examine those and reflect upon those—and ultimately, to choose if they want not to believe in them."

Evidence of Effectiveness

What evidence exists to support the claims of character educators that such programs achieve the desired goals? In his reply, Leming indicates the practical difficulties incurred in obtaining evidence. "Research is expensive," he says frankly. "Also, when one researches character education, one is researching sophisticated social science variables which require sophisticated means of data collection and analysis. The research is time-consuming, expensive, and requires a high degree of expertise. This is not a priority for most schools."

With all the rhetoric devoted to character, why isn't research or documentation of character education efforts a priority? Leming replies: "Schools today are held accountable for standards. We test kids to death, and most of those tests deal with standards set by state and national assessment programs. The priorities of superintendents and building principals are to have their students do well on standardized tests, get National Merit Scholarship winners, and have their school districts do well competitively with other school districts. The time a school would have to spend to develop these programs and evaluate them does not fit the political landscape of what people expect out of schools."

He questions whether schools perceive a need for research to evaluate their efforts to shape character. "The present character education movement is almost a moral crusade. Simply to say you are addressing the values questions of students is almost sufficient for many schools."

In addition, actual evidence of effectiveness varies widely, he reports. "If one asks: 'Is a program effective?', implied in that is a cause and effect claim, the idea that changes in student behavior can be attributed to the program. In order to make that claim it is necessary to have some sort of an experimental design with a control group or comparison group, a treatment, and an assessment of changes between the two groups.

"There is plenty of anecdotal evidence which lists changes in behavior that a school administrator has seen, but this evidence is anecdotal with no attempt to control for sources of bias in these claims. However, these claims satisfy many people.

"Yet if we're going to try to assess effects of these programs, that commits us to some type of experimental design. I have been able to identify only a couple of studies that I would call carefully controlled studies, over time, where the effect of a program on kids' character-related behavior has been analyzed."

Lessons Learned

What can be learned from previous national efforts at character education? Were they failures, or successes? Leming points to striking parallels between the character education movement of the 1920s and the current movement. "To some extent, certain aspects of the character education movement of the '20s persisted well

into the last half of this century."

To many, these lasting effects may seem surprising: organized efforts to build student cohesiveness and community through homerooms, clubs, and codes. Leming enlarges: "Homerooms developed coterminously with the character education movement, but were seen as an opportunity to put kids with adults in settings where adults could model good behavior and talk to kids about good behavior. Homerooms existed until the 1990s; in many schools they still exist and are seen as a more intimate collegial environment where an adult is placed with children in a non-academic setting, where questions of conduct and character are relevant."

Clubs were another legacy of the character education movement of the 1920s, he says. "In my own junior high school in the 1950s, there were over 25 clubs to which students belonged, such as a chess club, photography club and a sports discussion club. Clubs were a mechanism set up by the character education movement to foster character, and were still viable in the 1950s as part of the total school experience for kids."

Yet today most clubs have disappeared, squeezed out by the press for coverage that dominates the school schedule. "Today, kids walk into the school at 8:15, walk out at 3:00, and in-between they have had seven periods and a half-hour lunch period. There are still extracurricular activities, but clubs have disappeared. They have been negotiated out of the school day by teacher unions.

"Working with clubs used to be something teachers did because of a sense of duty, but when it became important to cram more academics into the school day, clubs became superfluous."

Codes also have become an artifact, but persisted into the 1960s, he says. "When I taught high school in Chicago in the 1960s, every classroom in the school had a plaque over the blackboard which described the school's code, listing things like responsibility, diligence, discipline, honesty. This was a code of character.

"One of the ways in which the character education movement of the '20s attempted to accomplish its goals was to list codes of good conduct and have kids memorize these codes and give examples of the codes."

Rather than viewing the character education movement of the '20s as a failure, Leming reports fascination with the lack of attention given it by educational historians. "According to many histories of American education, it didn't exist historically. My belief is that there was a gradual shift in educational priorities over time: the Great Depression followed by the rise of fascism and Nazism, World War II, post-war recovery, the Cold War, the need to compete with other nations by other means than war. National priorities shifted. We felt much more threatened by external forces, so the attention to character didn't disappear but it no longer attracted the majority of attention."

An Exemplary Program

What vision does Leming have of an "ideal" or "exemplary" character education program? In his reply, Leming qualifies his answer. "Most of what we know about effective character education programs is based upon what has been done at the elementary school level, but there are a number of things which need to happen in order to have an effective program.

"First, there must be a clear vision of what the school wants to accomplish. This must be communicated in a meaningful way to students; they must understand what it is that is of value, what types of character are desirable, and why they're desirable.

"Second, there has to be consistency throughout the school, between classrooms, among staff—from the principal to the teachers to the teachers' aides. There must be support from the parents and the broader community for this view of what good character is. Good conduct has to be rewarded.

"Teachers themselves—and this is a fairly unpopular idea—have to be models of good character. They have to be attractive and authoritative to children or to youth. You will not be credible unless kids take you seriously, unless you are seen as an authoritative person, a person worth emulating, a person who knows what he or she is talking about."

He adds: "Some teachers just can't do that. There are some teachers who can inspire and motivate, and others who are lazy in their approach to instruction, inconsistent in their dealings with kids, slovenly in their personal demeanor and physical appearance. Kids, quite frankly, aren't going to listen to those teachers.

"Finally, there needs to be a sense of community, a sense of shared values in the school and classroom. There is a need for group norms to support the character ideals that school staff are trying to communicate to kids. Somehow, we need to harness peer group dynamics and make them supportive of the types of character traits that we are trying to develop, such as responsibility, personal responsibility for sexual behavior, for the use of alcohol, for telling the truth, and being concerned about others."

Obviously, the barriers to an effective program are daunting, Leming concludes. "The general culture sends conflicting messages about good behavior. The other obstacle is the diversity in our society, which brings with it certain difficulties in attempting to give expression to the core values that tie us together. We have a tendency to become very contentious and divisive, to see anybody who says we all ought to value a certain ideal as a cultural imperialist. We've highly politicized our diversity in this country, and that makes it more and more difficult to find a common ground."

COMMENTARY

FLORENCE L. JOHNSON

PROPONENTS of character and values education seem to believe that school violence, disruption, irresponsible sexual activity, and other behaviors that are contrary to those welcomed in the school could be eliminated or considerably reduced if students were taught values and moral character. There is no question that the epidemic of violence which plagues schools and communities should be vigorously and systematically addressed, and any sensible strategy aimed at solving this problem is welcomed. While I agree that negative student attitudes, behaviors, and patterns need to improve, I'm less certain whether the teaching of character and values is an appropriate approach to this problem.

Research (Craig, 1992; Farrell, 1989) has shown that violence and other problems facing our contemporary students today are complex phenomena and cannot be explained by a single factor. Students who exhibit violent behavior are generally those characterized as at-risk—those children who live in poverty, are neglected, frequently experience violence, lack a nurturing family structure, are behind in school, and see no hope for the future (Farrell, 1989; Johnson et al., 1994).

Character and values education may not be productive in resolving these critical concerns since its definition is unclear and open for a wide range of interpretations. Webster (1983, p. 1302) defines values as "relative worth, utility, or importance." Character as defined by the Scott Foresman Dictionary means "all the qualities and features possessed; moral strength and weakness, the special way any person thinks and acts, integrity (p. 227)."

I fail to see how these definitions could be systematically framed into a curriculum for all children or how they can address violence and student alienation in school since there is no agreement on what or whose "qualities" and "worth" should become the norm. A person's culture, race, gender, social class, ethnicity, and other individual differences would be factors in what is considered "good" or "bad" qualities to teach and possess.

Rather than spending time deciding whose values to teach, I believe schools should establish strong nurturing support systems for all students, particularly those who are already at risk, with a goal of establishing trust and empowering the student to seek recognition through academic performance. Given that at-risk students, generally speaking, have not experienced stable and trusting relationships, a safe environment, nor school success, they need opportunities to talk about their problems with someone who will listen, understand, and help them develop self-sustaining coping skills that redirect behavior patterns and ways of thinking. They need skills in problem-solving and conflict management, such as mediation, to be utilized both in and out of school. They need to experience academic success and a belief that their teachers and principal care about them and their education.

Whether the final decision will be to place a stronger emphasis on teaching values, the challenge for educators seeking to make schools more effective for all children must be to sufficiently train faculty and staff to implement change. Educators are in need of Effective Schools training that will enable them to implement a data-driven instructional program in which the goals are high expectations for children's learning, high expectations for themselves as professionals, and a commitment to continuous improvement (Bullard & Taylor, 1993). To successfully manage change and educate our new student population, school staff need to understand the effects of their professional beliefs and attitudes on children's outcomes—beliefs about the child's ability to succeed in school. There is also a pressing need to develop competency in a wide range of pedagogical strategies, conflict prevention, intervention, and resolution.

Since students are the recipients of what and how we teach, teachers' knowledge and skill base must be sufficient to guarantee that students develop the ability to see themselves as valuable and worthy human beings; appreciate human diversity; make responsible decisions, solve problems, and think critically; and demonstrate mastery of grade-level curriculum objectives.

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